



News Release

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

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CHARLESTON C-17S DELIVER DURING LARGE PACKAGE WEEK

CHARLESTON AFB, SC -- Aircrews and maintainers from Charleston AFB teamed up July 13-21 with their counterparts from McChord AFB, Wash., Pope AFB, N.C., and Dyess AFB, Texas, during Large Package Week at Pope AFB.

"Large Package Week is a joint Army and Air Force preparation exercise for the 82nd Airborne Division (Fort Bragg, N.C.)," said Lt. Col. Steve Shope, 15th Airlift Squadron commander.

Shope said the exercise culminates the 82nd Airborne's intensive training cycle, which prepares one brigade, designated the division-ready brigade, to go on 24-hour standby for deployment.

"Typically, they like to jump in a brigade-sized force," Shope said. "We dropped almost 700 and almost 900 (paratroopers) on the last two nights to get them ready. That's the way they want to employ, so we have to be ready to do it that way. We meld our training requirements with theirs into a training scenario to benefit us both."

The scenario for LPW was to drop troops in to seize an airfield, then airdrop the Army's light airfield repair package to repair the runway and regain operations on the airfield, according to Shope. Once the LARP cleared the way for air-land operations, C-17s brought in the Immediate Ready Company of the 3rd Infantry at Fort Stewart, Ga., and its heavy airfield repair equipment, which included heavy graders, minefield detection and removal equipment, and armored personnel carriers. All of this was done on a dirt runway.

"We went back in after it was over, picked up the heavy package, and flew it back to Fort Stewart (Ga.)," Shope said. "On one plane there was about 100,000 pounds of payload, and we made it out of a 4,000-foot dirt runway. We'd never done that before."

It wasn't the only first of the mission, according to Shope.

The C-17 was without all-weather formation capability due to a long-term equipment deficiency, according to Shope. Boeing engineers fixed the problem, resulting in the ability to put more aircraft across the drop zone in a tighter formation.

"That expedited the build up of combat power on the ground," Shope said. "That was one huge goal of ours, to get the station keeping equipment back online for the C-17."

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Because the Army operates almost entirely on night vision goggles, aircrew members accomplished another first, according to Shope.

“We employed for the first time a formation NVG airdrop on covertly marked drop zones,” Shope said.

The 437th Airlift Wing commander grabbed another first during the week, according to Shope. Col. Brooks Bash was the first wing commander to land on a dirt strip in a C-17.

All told, C-17s dropped 2,651 paratroopers and 135 tons of Army equipment and ammunition during LPW, according to Shope.

But none of it would have happened without the maintainers who kept the aircraft moving, Shope said.

“Eighty-three of the 83 missions launched on time,” Shope said. “That’s a totally phenomenal performance by the maintenance guys.”

First Lt. Wade Cornelius, 437th Aircraft Generation Squadron Maintenance Flight commander, said the maintenance effort was a joint effort.

“The McChord team and Charleston team didn’t work like two separate bases,” Cornelius said. “They worked as a cohesive team toward a common goal – to launch aircraft.”

Completing the mission wasn’t easy, Cornelius said. Maintainers worked 14-15 hours a day to keep the jets fixed and flying.

“They couldn’t just stop and leave when it was convenient, because there was still work to be done,” Cornelius said. “And we did it all safely and without any injuries. The attitude of the NCOs and airmen was absolutely incredible.”

Three nights in a row, maintainers launched two nine-ship formations, with only two-and-a-half hours to fix and relaunch them again, Cornelius said.

“There was a phenomenal amount of teamwork between maintenance personnel and the operators, which made this large package a huge success,” Cornelius said. “The NCOs demonstrated amazing leadership on the flightline ensuring the right parts were available and the jets were fixed on time.”

Two of those NCOs were Master Sergeants Rick Bolick and Mike O’Hara, according to Cornelius.

Second Lt. Dex Adams, Bolick and O’Hara coordinated everything needed, from supply support to aerospace ground equipment, to make the maintenance aspect of LPW work, Cornelius said.

Shope gave credit to Captains Bill Spangenthal, the lead planner for the exercise, Joe Vanoni, the lead airdrop planner, and Mike Maguire, the lead airland planner.

“They did the lion’s share of the work,” Shope said. “It was a really fantastic plan and also key to making the exercise go smoothly, because of the level of detail they went to in planning.”

Shope also gave a lot of credit to Cornelius and the maintainers from both Charleston and McChord.

“They really came together as a team to make it happen for aircrews and the Army,” Shope said. “There were a lot of configuration changes, taking seats out for cargo, then reinstalling them, taking down the static lines for paratrooper drops. Turning them from cargo during the day to drop 100 troops at night was a lot of work.”

Cornelius said during the exercise, the working relationship between operations and maintenance was extremely smooth.

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“We worked as a team and were definitely successful ensuring a 100 percent take-off reliability rate,” said Cornelius. “It doesn’t get any better than that.

The next LPW is scheduled for September, Shope said, with McChord taking the lead. “We plan on giving them the same support they gave us, which was absolutely outstanding,” Shope said. “It wasn’t McChord and Charleston, it was really a C-17 community up there working together to make things happen.”

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